

6/3 no other personal relationship can override this:
593 both sexes have their permanent home with the mother throughout her life and accord her un-failing [70] reverence and affection. From this bond issues the unity of the sibling group, (9) particularly the strong tie between brother and sister which emotionally reflects the dependence of men on their mothers. With the elder sister as with the mother a man has an intimate relationship of reverence mingled with easy familiarity: the two may sit together and discuss affairs of their kin-group, and the sister early accords her brother the right to discipline her children. With her elder brother, as with her maternal uncle, after her puberty, a woman must maintain a formal etiquette of partial avoidance: she may not sit before him speak to him unasked, or be alone in a room or a house with him. Only if she gravely offends against traditional morality, he may traditionally beat her even after puberty, for a Nayar woman owes the same obedience to all older matrilineal kinsmen as a collectivity as does a woman of the patrilineal castes to her father and later her husband. Incest with the younger sister or classificatory sister or sister's daughter is a most heinous crime, formerly punishable by death, and in modern times by total ostracism by the caste and lineage. It does however occasionally take place and is evidently recognized as a temptation under matrilocal residence, hence the formal etiquette imposed to counter it.

594 In a traditional taravad, therefore, women form the core of the group: men stand on the

595 Traditionally, the visiting lover placed his wea-
833 pons outside the door as a warning to other men
that he was within. My informants reported
that more recently, until the end of the nine-
teenth century in some villages, if two lovers
of a woman called on the same night the one who
came last slept outside on the verandah. Usually
the regular lovers of a woman (who might not be
from the same lineage) knew each other and in-
formally agreed upon their turns.

595 It is difficult to decide from the evidence whe-
ther this instution of combined polyandrous and
polygynous mating can strictly be regarded as
"marriage" in any usual sense of the term.

Personally, I prefer the word "marriage" for
the ritual marriage of talikettukalyanam (which
old English speaking Nayars even today state to
have been "the real marriage"), because it gave
ceremonial recognition, to a stable relationship
of perpetual hereditary affinal kinship between
lineages in the local group. Moreover, although
exclusive sexual rights in the woman were given
up at once at the "divorce", the observance of
death [74] pollution by the woman and her child-
ren indicates that in some sense the relation-
ship was thought to continue for life.

595 However, the evidence suggests that post-
684 puberty liaisons too were perhaps not entirely
551 promiscuous; moreover, the more permanent
of them at all events were attended by ceremon-
ial obligations. First, liaisons were strictly
limited to men of the appropriate "good" castes:
sex unions with men of lower caste were cate-
gorically forbidden and for women, punishable

595
• 596
597
by immediate death. For this reason it was necessary, when a woman became pregnant, for her to be able to name one or more lovers of appropriate subcaste who might have fathered the child. These men must then acknowledge their responsibility by paying the expenses of delivery (petta chilavu - clothing, rice and vegetables) to the barber-midwife who attended at births. If no appropriate lover came forward to do so, the woman was deemed to have cohabited with a low caste man and was excommunicated. Even today, a girl who becomes pregnant before the (modern) marriage ceremony is easily exculpated if she can name a Nayar or higher caste lover who will pay her deliver expenses. She is then by old custom tacitly regarded as having been married to him, and if he chooses not to visit her again, has little difficulty in finding a second husband. If however no expenses are paid, she is assumed to have had relations with a low caste man, a Christian or a Muslim, and though excommunication is not now effectual, she falls into social disgrace. She is unlikely henceforth to find a Nayar husband, and her household may find difficulty in marrying away other girls of her generation

595
596
In addition to the delivery expenses, a Nayar of the local subcaste group who entered into a relationship with a girl was expected to present her with a loincloth on the first night of visiting her. Thereafter, if he continued to visit her, he must make customary gifts of clothing, [75] bathing- and hair-oil, and vegetables, at Onam, Vishu and Tiruvadhira, (10) the three main

581 outside on the verandah before he comes to visit
595 her.

These statements however again require some modification in the case of hypergamous unions. In recent years at all events, a powerful Nambudiri or royal landowner might occasionally force his attentions on a Nayar woman, whose family would be unlikely to oppose him. In two cases I even heard of Nambudiris who had succeeded in carrying on a liaison with a dead Nayar wife's younger sister, though this is contrary to Nayar rules of mating and led to unhappiness and strong covert [77] disapproval among the woman's kinsmen. In general, however, the traditional picture of Nayar marriage is one in which women voluntarily seek the favours of men: rape, for example, is a crime apparently unheard of among them. Certainly, cases are recorded of the dismissal of a higher caste man by a Nayar woman.

613 Combined polyandrous and polygynous mating
595 had a function in maintaining the unity of the
592 lineage. It seems that in every matrilineal system one basic conflict is inherent, namely the conflict between a man's ties to his natal kin on the one hand and to his kin by marriage and procreation on the other. In the Nayar system in this area, the conflict was resolved by almost completely eliminating the claims of the father and his kin. Polyandry and polygyny, combined, minimized the rights of the husband and father, and dispersed their roles between a number of men. This preserved the unity of the lineage, by preventing the close attachment of men to

Nayar: Central Kerala

327 613

the lineage they were legally mandatory. The local caste assembly, with the backing of royal or chiefly authority, could take action against offenders. Intra-lineage incest was indeed a crime punishable by death. As a matter of courtesy, lineage members extended appropriate kinship terms to one another. [623] [692] [684] [601]

Unless it was declining in numbers and had shrunk to the proportions of a single household, the lineage was not an economic unit. Its members did not jointly own an estate and did not cooperate in the production or distribution of goods. These functions accrued to the small segment of a lineage occupying a single homestead, which I call a property group. Lineage kin were the residual heirs of a property group which died out. However, such reversion of property was rare. A property group which had no childbearing women usually adopted one or more girls from some other branch of the lineage in order to perpetuate itself. [474] [768] [597]

A "commoner" lineage had no headman. Its oldest man commanded special respect but he had no legal authority over the lineage as a whole. The office of headman of the lineage existed only in village headmen's, chiefly, and royal lineages. Here the political office was theoretically vested in the eldest man of the lineage, irrespective of branch. These lineages had a somewhat different structure, discussed below. [622]

The members of a lineage engaged in cooperative activities at two major life crises: the pre-puberty marriage rite of girls, and the funeral of a member, followed by offerings to the departed spirit on the fifteenth and sixteenth days after the death. [613] [476] [588]

Both of these occasions involved the caste assembly of the neighborhood and the institution of linked lineages or *enangar*. The caste assembly comprised the eldest men (*kāranavar*) of all the property groups. It met periodically on a mound (*tara*) near the Bhagavadi temple of the neighborhood to manage the temple's affairs. It also judged offenses against the religious laws of the caste. [765] [564] [623] [692]

Each lineage was linked by hereditary ties of ceremonial cooperation to two or three other lineages of the neighborhood. These linkages were reciprocal but not exclusive. For example, lineage A might have as *enangar* B, C, and D, whereas B might have A, E, and F, and so on. A chain of such relationships therefore linked all lineages of the neighborhood.

The *enangar* were partners who offered help in a ceremonial manner at all major life crises. They stood as formal links between the lineage and the total neighborhood group, which was called the *enangu*. In

Nayar: Central Kerala

331

castes, or receive customary help from their enangar at life-crisis ceremonies. If the ostracism was not effected it was believed that the whole neighborhood would fall into disfavor with the caste goddess and might become prey to epidemic or crop failure.

The point on which I am uncertain is whether the lineage as a whole was ostracized, or whether other branches of the lineage normally retained their caste status by severing their own connections with the offender's property group. The latter actually occurred in a case in Cochin in 1924. A Sudra Nayar woman had sex relations with a man of the caste of Nayar funeral priests. Shortly after the assembly met, the other houses of her lineage repudiated all connection with the offender's household, which alone remained ostracized for a year. The woman and her lover then fled to Malaya. The household paid its fine and was reaccepted to caste. I do not know whether it was possible under native rule for a lineage to repudiate its responsibilities in this way.

Minor offenses, such as dining with low-caste people, were settled by the offender's property group paying a fine to the village temple. The offender and his household were purified from their pollution by certain ritual acts. They then gave a feast to their enangar at which they were publicly reaccepted to caste. Traditionally, graver offenses (such as the one above) met harsher penalties. The caste's judgment on such an offense traditionally had to be ratified by the district chief or by a royal officer. The offender was then either executed by his immediate matrilineal kin or surrendered to the king for sale into slavery. His household members performed his funeral rites and only then were they taken back into caste.

Whether or not the lineage as a whole was held collectively responsible for offenses against the religious law of the caste, it was not held responsible for civil wrongs judged by the village headman or for crimes judged by the chief or by officers of the royal court. The property group, headed by its karanavan, and not the whole lineage, was responsible in cases of theft, debt, or other offenses concerning property which were judged by the village headman. With regard to a major crime, a Nayar who murdered another was tried in the court of the king or of a higher chief. If the murdered man was of the same or a higher caste than the murderer, the murderer was executed by a small group of Nayars selected by the judge. If the murdered man was of lower caste, the murderer's property group had to pay a fine to the district chief. Again, if a Nayar of any rank committed treason

604
613
561
578 to the mother's husband in their earliest years, there seems no doubt that a great part of their hostility to male elders became focused on the mother's brothers by about the age of five, and that much of it remained conscious. Thus occasional stories are told today of nephews who poisoned or stabbed their mothers' brothers and it is often remarked that karanavans are "hated" and that "their position is not safe." Such tales of violence are regarded as shocking, but they do not arouse the horror with which a Hindu of the patrilineal castes would receive a story of patricide.

604
561
578 Relationships with the mother's mother's brothers were less intense and rivalrous than with the mother's brothers. Until the age of three or four a small boy might be a playful visitor to the room of the great-uncle who was his karanavan. Often, this elder died while he was still small, so that the boy retained only affectionate memories of him. Otherwise he learned to behave with even greater formality to this elder than to his mother's brothers. He saw the great-uncle less often, however, and was seldom directly punished by him, so that the relationship tended to remain one of distant geniality.

604 MAN-SISTER'S DAUGHTER

As the head of her taravād a karanavan owed his sister's daughter maintenance, shelter, and legal and physical protection. At her tāl rite and during her subsequent marriage relationships, only the sexual rights in a woman were lost to her taravād. All other rights, in her procreative powers and domestic services, remained vested in her taravād, represented by its karanavan. He could command her obedience in the performance of household and minor agricultural work. He automatically became the full legal guardian of children born to her legitimately. If she seriously infringed the religious laws of her caste, for example, by having sex relations with a man of lower caste, it was his duty to expel her from the taravād and his right (very occasionally exercised) to put her to death by the sword.

604
584
595
178 In the nineteenth century, when monogamy gradually became customary, a karanavan arranged the marriage of his sister's daughter. In earlier periods Nayar women seem to have exercised considerable freedom to select or reject their husbands. A woman might not, however, oppose her karanavan's right to dismiss an unwelcome husband.

604 All the mother's brothers of a woman had the right to command her domestic services and to discipline her in minor ways. As in the case of a boy, they might play with her until she reached the age of three or four, after which they became somewhat feared authorities.

[861] A man might occasionally beat his sister's daughter, until the age of

354

Kathleen Gough

Organized

593
[578] duels as well as illegal battles between lineages seem to have been fought chiefly to vindicate a kinwoman from the unproven charge of cohabitation with a man of low caste, or to protect her from any form of obscene slander. Such approved forms of aggression against Nayars of other lineages may have provided outlets for a brother's sexual jealousy, which he might show only covertly toward his sister's socially recognized husbands. If, on the other hand, a woman were finally judged guilty of sexual relations with a man of low caste, the law permitted her brothers to vent their jealous fury by putting her and her lover to death.

BROTHERS

[56] The relationship between brothers had much in common with that between a man and his sister's son. Age rank was of the greatest significance: even twins, or classificatory brothers born on the same day, were mutually ranked in terms of birth order, the elder preceding the younger in succession to the karanavanship. Brothers near in age played together in early childhood, but toward adolescence their behavior became formalized to the point of partial avoidance. The elder might command the junior to do small tasks for him. A much older brother might inflict corporal punishment within the limits set by the karanavan's authority. In general, a man's etiquette in the presence of his brother was the same as that shown to the mother's brother. A man whose elder brother was also his karanavan treated him with even greater respect and when possible avoided his presence.

The social distance required between brothers must have been made possible by the fact that they were often absent from home, and that, when home, they had little need to cooperate in work. In modern times a man who resides with his elder brother or mother's brother usually works independently outside the taravād, spends much time in his wife's house, and restricts his intercourse with his senior to mealtimes and to formal consultations concerning their property. Unfortunately we do not know what, if any, was the structure of authority or the division of functions between brothers who traditionally fought together in war.

243
578 Great rivalry was admitted to exist in the relationship between brothers. They were thought of as bound to the taravād through their mother and sisters, rather than directly to each other. At the same time, sons of the same mother could be expected to support each other in conflicts with children of the mother's sister, while both sibling groups might experience a common resentment of their maternal uncles' authority. In broader contexts, the men of a property

843
595
431 paternity. This they did by making gifts to the woman herself and to the midwife immediately after the birth. Any man who had visited the woman in the appropriate time period was required to make these gifts. If a man refused, he could be called upon by the caste assembly to fulfill his obligation. The gifts comprised two new lower cloths for the mother and one cloth and a quantity of paddy as payment to the Nayar woman barber who attended at the delivery. Again, these gifts were clearly legal and ceremonial tokens rather than objects of substantial economic value. Legally, however, their transfer was of the utmost significance. For if no man would consent to make the delivery payments, the woman was assumed to have had sex relations with a man of lower caste or with a Muslim or a Christian. Her caste assembly would temporarily excommunicate her taravād until she and her child had been driven out by their karanavan and the woman's funeral rites had been performed. The woman, presumably with her child, might be executed by her matrilineal kinsmen or allowed to become a slave of the district chief or the king. If the woman and her lover were publicly exposed even before the birth of the child, both might be put to death.

595 A woman had no obligations to her husbands other than the granting of sexual privileges. Nayar husbands of the woman's own caste occasionally dined in her household but this was a favor and not a right. Nayar households sometimes provided uncooked food and a separate building for Brahman or chiefly husbands, but this again seems to have been a matter of courtesy rather than of obligation. Husbands of higher caste made the same gifts to their wives as did Nayar husbands.

595 In the nineteenth century her karanavan selected a woman's first husband, and he may have done so at earlier periods. Until the 1930's many karanavans also retained the right to dismiss a husband who displeased them. It seems improbable, however, that a woman or her karanavan would ever refuse the visits of a Brahman, chief, or village headman of powerful standing in the community. In some cases also a husband of higher caste seems to have monopolized the favors of a Nayar woman, a privilege not accorded to men of her own caste. K. Kannan Nair reported (1908: 186) that until a century previously local chiefs sometimes compelled a woman to receive as husbands those of her enangar who wished to marry her. In general, however, women seem to have been free to reject particular men, and both men and women to terminate liaisons without formality.

000 In all possible respects attempts seem to have been made to reduce

000 taravād. A woman might also visit for several weeks each year.
594 Brother and younger sister, like a man and his sister's daughter, ob-
[593] served rules of partial avoidance—associated with incest prohibitions
[604]—during their periods of co-residence.

591 Sisters were always separated upon marriage, for the Nayars of
582 this area, unlike those to the south, forbade the marriage of two
brothers to two sisters. They say that such marriages would endanger
the unity of the brothers' taravād by introducing into it too strong a
613 contingent from another lineage (Gough, 1962). Sisters were together,
591 however, during childhood in their father's house, and were often
[593] reunited in old age when they went back to the taravād. Although
[763] they might seldom have stayed there during childhood and early
youth, women seem usually to have died in their matrilineal an-
[586] cestral homes. A woman was often widowed in old age. Alternatively
she might elect to leave her husband and return to her taravād and
[764] sons when her period of childbearing was ended. In any case a
woman's body had to be cremated and her funeral rites performed
in the garden of her taravād house.

[431] Women in avunculocal residence were partly maintained by their
husbands' taravāds in return for domestic services. Nevertheless, im-
portant distributive ties persisted between them and their matrilineal
kinsmen. Usually their kāranavan sent quantities of grain and clothing
to them and their children twice annually after the harvests as part
of their maintenance.

585 MARRIAGE

[582] Following the tāll' rite, a girl entered into a marriage relationship
(sambandham) with one man at about the age of eleven. The father's
sister's son, if of suitable age, was considered the rightful claimant.
[686] If the girl did not marry him her kāranavan must pay a token fine to
him at the marriage ceremony. The giving of the cloth by the
husband which marked the start of a sambandham was carried out
with ceremony in the girl's ancestral house and was the occasion for
a large feast to relatives of both parties. After the marriage had been
consummated in the girl's house the couple were ceremonially con-
ducted to the bridegroom's taravād and the girl was formally received
into it by her husband's mother and his kāranavan's wife.

[684] While a marriage endured the husband had exclusive rights in his
[848] wife's sexuality. If he detected her in adultery he might by custom
kill her lover, cut off the hair of his wife, and send her home after
divorce. A woman was not, however, excommunicated from caste

Nayar North Kerala

399

and her children were not illegitimate unless she had relations with a man of low caste.

A woman normally lived with her husband in his ancestral home or in a separate house on his ancestral land. He then owed her physical protection and at least a part of her food and clothing, in return for limited domestic services. Occasionally a man might choose to visit his wife in her ancestral home if she lived nearby. In this case he might work on her ancestral land or bring periodic provisions of grain and clothing to her and her children. He would eat sometimes in his ancestral house and sometimes in the house of his wife. In all marriages a husband was obliged to pay the full expenses of delivery when his wife bore a child in her ancestral home and, additionally, to supply grain and other food to her throughout the six months which she spent in her taravād at this time.

A woman owed respect and obedience to her husband. He had the right to scold or even to beat her if she disregarded his wishes. Polygyny was permitted and was fairly common among village headmen, chiefs, and royalty. The polygynous husband usually provided separate houses for his wives on his ancestral estate.

Theoretically, either party might divorce the other at will, but in fact it was usually the husband who initiated a divorce. We do not know how common divorce was in the traditional period. At present it is rare in wealthy landowning lineages, although it probably takes place rather more frequently than among aristocratic Mappillas of North Kerala. It is more usual among the poorer Nambiar commoners, although probably less frequent than among the poorer Tiyyars of this area.

Widows might remarry freely by traditional law. Today it is somewhat rare for a widow to remarry if she has children under the age of three or four; we do not know whether this was the case traditionally. A widow who does remarry almost invariably leaves her children by the first marriage behind in her taravād, in the care of her mother or some other older natal kinswomen. Such children may visit their mother in their stepfather's house but they have no customary rights of maintenance there, and it is considered that their own taravād is the correct place for them to live.

Thus in North Kerala, by contrast with Central Kerala, differences of paternity may create structural divisions among the children born of one mother. All are of the same taravād and share the same fundamental birth-status rights, but if their fathers were different they

The Killing or assault of a Nayar

451

outside the lineage led to feuds between lineages or between larger territorial units. In Cochin, the king had more power than in Kottayam to curtail such feuds or confine them to organized duels for which a fee must be paid. Minor offences against caste law, such as dining with low caste persons, were tried by the subcaste assembly of the village and resulted in temporary excommunication of the offender's property group and the payment of a fine to the village goddess's temple.

The *kāranavan* had the legal right to punish offences within the property group and also those offences against caste law for which the caste held the property group responsible until justice had been done. Incest and murder within the lineage appear to have been punished by expulsion from the *taravād* by the *kāranavan* and from the caste by the caste assembly. In cases of grave insubordination by a junior member, the *kāranavan* had the right to deny him maintenance or access to the ancestral house until he mended his behavior.

Thus the supernatural agents of the village and the *taravād* primarily acted to force the human authorities to carry out their judicial duties. If, for example, the caste failed to excommunicate the *taravād* of an individual who had sinned against its religious laws, it was believed that the village goddess would strike the village with epidemic, flood, or some such misfortune. Similarly, if incest within the lineage went undetected or unpunished, the lineage ghosts and the patron goddess might cause the offenders to die or might bring misfortune on the *taravād* as a whole.

The fact that any member of the *taravād* may suffer as a result of the misdemeanors of any other, carries into the realm of supernatural sanctions the collective responsibility of the *taravād* in social and legal affairs. If a man breaks a ritual rule of the caste, his whole *taravād* is polluted and liable for excommunication. If a death or birth occurs, the whole lineage is temporarily polluted and excluded from normal social life. At the back of these norms lies the fact that the *taravād* is an economic and legal corporation. Its property is owned jointly, and the *taravād* is responsible for the debts of any one member. Its male members must support each other in feuds against other lineages. It is not surprising that the concept of being members one of another in secular affairs is projected into the realm of mystical retributions.

The points at which supernatural agents might replace, or act instead of, human authorities, appear to have been those where a subordinate was wronged by one who was himself a powerful authority and could manipulate the law. Thus lineage ghosts were probably particularly effective in punishing or setting to rights misdemeanors of the *kāranavan* himself. I am uncertain whether, in traditional law, junior members could sue in court for the deposition of an erring *kāranavan*. They certainly possessed this right in British law, but even so, it was very difficult before 1933 to get rid of a *kāranavan*. The lineage ghosts appear to have provided important sanctions against a *kāranavan*'s misdoings, for they brought misfortune on a *taravād* whose *kāranavan* disgraced its reputation for hospitality or squandered its property. I was told that the former custom by which a junior member might be possessed by a ghost and voice its threats to the *taravād* added force to the complaints of young men who were cheated by their *kāranavans*. The fact that only the *kāranavan* may propitiate the lineage ghosts points up both his responsibility to the ghosts to ensure good conduct and prosperity in his *taravād*, and also his responsibility to his juniors to ensure the favor of the ghosts.

I have myself recorded no case in which lineage ghosts were believed to have actually prevented a crime on the part of a *kāranavan*, as distinct from punishing one. V. K.

Cults of the Dead Among the Nāyars

435

between males, for a woman does not offer the threat of a rival to her male superior. Difference of sex, however, makes this relationship even more formal than that between men. Women do not appear frequently in the presence of their mothers' brothers. They occupy separate wings of the house, and intercourse between the sexes is severely restricted. Toward older brothers a woman's relationship is restricted almost to the point of avoidance. If she commits a misdemeanor, especially a sexual one, a woman immediately fears men senior to her in the *taravād*. Formerly, she might be executed by her brothers if she had sexual relations with a lower caste man. In an orthodox household today, a girl who becomes pregnant by a low caste man will be either expelled from the house by her male seniors or, at best, will be thrashed and will receive much subsequent harsh treatment.

It may be wondered why, since women are excluded from legal authority and from participation in the cult, ancestresses are believed capable of harming *taravād* members. The explanation of this, too, seems to lie in the content of relationships with the mother and other natal kinswomen. Women have no legal authority over their juniors. Indeed, the mother of a *kāranavan* is herself under his jurisdiction. Women do, however, exercise great moral authority over their children throughout their lives. In Cochin with duoloccal residence, the care of children under about the age of five is almost entirely in the hands of women in a traditional *taravād*. Their fathers have no rights over them, the *kāranavan* is too remote a figure to concern himself with details of child training, and junior men of the *taravād* are often absent from home. A mother commonly treats her small children with indulgence, but is necessarily also the source of many frustrations, while the maternal grandmother and women of her generation are strict disciplinarians.

In Kottayam, where residence was traditionally avunculocal, children were frequently brought up in the *taravād* of the father. In such households today, the child has an intimate, affectionate relationship with his father who undertakes a part of his personal care. When the father's *kāranavan* is also the mother's father (as fairly often occurs with cross-cousin marriage), he and his wife treat the child with indulgence. Otherwise, they tend to have only a slight relationship with him and may even resent his claim to temporary hospitality in their house. The mother is, in these circumstances, again the child's chief mentor and disciplinarian, and he learns very early that his mother's brothers, though living elsewhere, are the real authorities whom he must respect and to whom he will return at adolescence, as their heir. In both areas the reverence acquired for the mother is perpetuated throughout life. Her wishes and those of his elder sister take precedence over those of a man's wife, to whom he has a very subsidiary attachment. The relationship with the mother is clearly characterized by great depth of emotion and by greater tenderness than that toward male seniors. Even so, it appears that in this relationship too, the emotion is usually consciously ambivalent. I illustrate this statement briefly with reference to the relationship between only one man and his mother, but it is characteristic of many. This Cochin Nāyar, aged thirty-five, visited us stealthily in the evenings and kept his visits from his mother, telling her he had business in the town. He was afraid she would become jealous, and angry with him for eating Christian food. She watched over him, upbraiding him when he spent much time in the house of his wife and children. He took care to be prompt for meals, and although he found her food inadequate he would not complain in case he appeared to slight her cookery. He had had a high

Cults of the Dead Among the Nāyars

to lineage ghosts who were junior to them in age. The living of the *taravād* themselves make offerings to them and do them obeisance, whereas the ghosts of hostile serfs are especially polluting and malevolent and can be propitiated only by persons of their own caste. 782
465 769 613 566 564

Even so, the ghost of such a lower caste person who is honored for heroism by the *taravād* of his masters may, if he died violently, be feared as an alien ghost by other *taravāds*. In Kottayam in the eighteenth century, for example, there lived a certain Nāyar village headman who had as his servant a man of the Tiyyar caste of cultivators. During the invasions of Malabar by the Mysorean Muslim general, Tipu Sultan, in the 1780's, the Nāyar's *taravād* was threatened with conquest and forcible conversion to Islam. Having sent the women and children of his house into hiding, the *kāranavan* prayed before his lineage's patron goddess until the Muslims were at his gates. He then persuaded his Tiyyar servant to kill him, being unwilling to face the disgrace of circumcision at the hands of the Muslims. Having slain his master, the servant hid himself in an outhouse of the *taravād*. In the night he went forth and attacked the Muslims single-handed, killing several of them to avenge his master, before he was himself put to death. The ghost of this servant is now propitiated along with the lineage ghosts of his master's *taravād*. It is also, however, propitiated as an alien ghost by several other *taravāds* in the neighborhood. 769 613 566 564 175 782

Occasionally, malevolent alien ghosts are those of Nāyars who died violently, often in expiation of some crime. They may have committed suicide after being outcaste for contravention of religious laws, or in the case of a woman, may have been killed by their matrilineal kinsmen after cohabiting with low caste men. A woman called Kārangōtt Makkam, also of Kottayam, became a ghost in this way. According to legend, she was suspected by her sister-in-law of having sexual relations with an oilmonger. Her brothers banished her from the *taravād*. She was agonized at the thought of leaving her children, and drowned them in the *taravād*'s well. Her *kāranavan* and brothers were then obliged to stab her to death—the customary penalty for fornication outside the caste, and perhaps, also, for murder within the *taravād*. She became an alien ghost particularly liable to prevent women from bearing children, and is established in the gardens of several local *taravāds*. 769 613 684 [762] [682] [842]

Such alien ghosts, although Nāyar, are also propitiated by an officiant of the lower caste. The propitiator is usually from some caste which specializes in exorcism and counter-magic, such as Mannāns (washermen), Kanisans (astrologers, who in any case diagnose the misfortune and advise the propitiation) or Pānans (umbrella-makers, exorcists and agricultural workers). The mode of propitiation is the same as in the case of a low caste ghost. 769 564 782

Finally, an alien ghost is occasionally that of a Brahman who died violently. Brahman ghosts, or Brahmarākṣas, unlike all other ghosts, must be propitiated with vegetarian offerings by a Brahman priest hired for the purpose. But Brahman priests, unlike low caste officiants, never enter a state of voluntary possession by ghosts. Religious possession is particularly a low caste institution. It is not practiced by Brahmins, and when found among Nāyars, it is practiced by young men, women, and other persons who lack secular power. Brahmins do not need to become possessed by their ghosts and deities, for they have the power to demand whatever offerings and fees they require. Low caste propitiators need the authority of a supernatural agent in order to make demands on their high caste masters. (787)

591

184

lives in the house with her husband. A point to be noted in this connection is that, when her husband dies, she must leave his house and return to her own at once, before his body is carried out. According to the Kērala Māhātmyam the women in North Malabar (should) live with but one man at a time.

58

We still, after the manner of children, confound words with things, so it is not surprising that the unfortunate Commission arrived at the conclusion that the institution of marriage was and is entirely absent from the Marumakkattāyam system. "The parties do not plight troth, and do not call God to witness their union." And so forth. But with this conclusion, suitable enough to the high-flown moralist or to the restless beings who would regardlessly sweep away the long results of time and improve on the process of natural development, imposing fanciful arrangements of their own, the anthropologist cannot at all agree. The Sambandham, a regularly formed, and certainly not haphazard alliance between a man and a woman, having the full sanction of the community, is marriage in every sense of the word. If the tāli-tying ceremony gave the girl free liberty, we might well suspect that the Sambandham followed a ceremony, not a marriage ceremony. But such is by no means the case, for, should the woman who is unmarried, for whom Sambandham has not been arranged, or whose husband, the man with whom she had had Sambandham, is dead—there is no such thing as widowhood,—bear a child, she is disgraced, much as is the Brāhman widow under the same circumstances.

[848]

581

585

What then is the meaning of the assertions of the exponents of the orthodox view that the woman need not be chaste; and so on? The question is not an easy one to answer, but I think we may say with confidence that this orthodox view has been, in some measure, propounded by the Nambūtiris for their own gratification. I have myself known several tragedies arising out of unfaithfulness, and I believe the old fashioned code of custom admitted the right of the husband to kill his wife's lover if he could, and also to kill his wife. No doubt in a great many cases the pair bound together in Sambandham lead lives ordinarily chaste. I do not, however, think that in actuality such is the rule with either party any more than it is in any other community, and sexual affairs are often treated lightly. With taste and consideration too, Hamilton, who arrived at Calicut in 1702, and spent some twenty odd years on the coast,

[848]

Nayax

54

E. KATHLEEN GOUGH

588 collapsed and the old system of differential land-rights between Nambūdiris and rulers on
 564 the one hand and their Nayar tenants on the other has been seriously undermined. Yet even
 178 today Nayars remark with pride that their lineage has 'fathers' in the lineages of their former
 landlords and chiefs, while chiefs and royalty alike revere their Nambūdiri *genitors*, and boast
 that the blood of these Gods of the earth is running in their veins.

PART II. THE NAYAR *Tali-Rite* IN NORTH MALABAR

131 NORTH MALABAR LIES NORTH OF THE KORA RIVER, being the old kingdoms of Kolattiri,
 133 Kurumbrattiri, and Kadattunad. Except for the coast-towns expanded by Europeans, it is
 361 sparsely populated and mountainous; part of it is forest. Villages lie separated by hill ranges,
 [635] usually as clusters of houses on the hillsides surrounding small wet paddy-flats in the valleys.
 This contrasts with South Malabar and Cochin, where the coastal plain is wider, paddy-land
 extensive, and settlement usually continuous between villages.

175 Perhaps because of its difficult environment, North Malabar did not before 1792 approach
 631 the degree of political centralization achieved in the central area. The Kolattiri Rajas, it is
 true, temporarily conquered Kottayam, Kurumbranad, and Kadattunad, but the area was
 never consolidated as was the Zomorin's kingdom. Within the small kingdoms, *nāduvaris*
 [628] fought each other and rebelled against their Rajas, allying themselves with different rulers
 [627] as suited their needs of the moment. Neighbouring *desavaris* sometimes fought each other within
 the *nādu*, while within the *desam*, *kudipaga* (lineage-feud) persisted till modern times.

564 Consistent with this lack of political centralization, high-class Nayars were not divided
 631 into sub-castes with administrative and occupational functions. Instead they had exogamous
 613 clans, dispersed between many villages. In Kottayam and Kolattunad the bulk of Nayars
 423 were Nambiaris, independent land-owners owing only nominal allegiance to a chief, *Desavaris*,
 [614] appointed by the Raja or the *nāduvaris*, had administrative powers in their villages but belonged
 to the same sub-caste as other Nambiaris. In most villages the land was divided between the
 Nayar property-groups as owners, Nayar tenancies being less common than in the south.
Nāduvaris lineages, however, usually owned the land in the whole village where they lived,
 employed Nambiar tenants as retainers, and claimed superior caste-rank, calling themselves
 Samantan Nambiaris. Nambūdiri Brahmins are fewer in the north than in the south, especi-
 ally since the Muslim invasions from Mysore in the 1760s, when many fled to Travancore.
 Those who remain live as landlords in widely separated villages, with local Nambiar lineages
 as retainers. The Nayar servant castes are spatially distributed as in the south. The lower
 polluting castes of manual workers are present in similar proportions, but Tiyyars and their
 washermen and barbers are matrilineal in North Malabar, patrilineal in the south.

613 *The Nayar Kinship System.* North Malabar Nayars, though trained in arms in the private
 [701] gymnasia of their lineages, were not recruited as a permanent militia of the kingdom. Instead
 [566] they cultivated their own lands with the aid of Tiyyar tenants, the serf castes being absent over
 most of the area. It seems largely because of this difference of occupation, North Malabar
 591 Nayars are virilocal: a wife moves on marriage to the ancestral house of her husband, and
 613 remains with him with rare exceptions till his death. Her children are brought up by their
 594 father and commonly return to their own lineage at puberty. A boy then begins to manage
 [582] his *taravad* property under the direction of his *kāranaras*, while a girl is shortly afterwards
 married, from the lineage house, by common consent of her *kāranaras* and her father, often to
 the *kāranaras*' son or to a maternal nephew of the father.

586 Divorce is permitted, but is rarer than in the south. Polygyny is rare, polyandry even
 595 traditionally forbidden. A cuckolded husband formerly cut off the hair of his wife and returned
 684 her to her lineage. The *genitor* has customary rights in and obligations to his children. In
 851

are allowed greater freedom in the choice as well as in the divorce of husbands (*sambandhakāraṇs*), and the females in the family do not interfere in their freedom so long as it does not produce any domestic scandal. The orthodox view is that, as the woman is not independent, she seldom thinks of relinquishing the husband. Arbitrary divorce is thus discouraged, and adultery is a grave social offence. A wife, who is disputatious, who steals her husband's property, who favours another than her husband, who converses with strangers, who is gluttonous, who enters strange houses, should be put away even though she may have born ten sons. Litigation between two families and disagreement between a husband and wife are also the causes. Social stigma follows the adulterer, and the adulteress loses her status in society.

A Nayar woman has to observe certain ceremonies during her first pregnancy. First during and after the seventh month of pregnancy, she bathes and worships the deity in the temple every morning, and eats before her morning meal, a small quantity of butter, over which holy *mantrams* have been recited by the temple priest or by Nambuthiris. This is done generally till delivery. *Pulikudi* (tamarind juice drinking) is an indispensable ceremony performed for every pregnant woman, by the rich and poor alike, on an auspicious day, in the ninth month of pregnancy. An auspicious day, nay, even the very hour, is fixed by the astrologer. The ceremony opens by the planting of a twig of the *ambāzha* tree (*Spondias mangifera*) on the morning of the day of the ceremony in the inner court-yard (*nadumittam*) or the northern wing of the house. At the appointed hour (*muhūrtam*), the pregnant woman, after having been bathed and properly attired, is conducted to the northern block of the house (*vatikkini*) where she is seated facing eastwards. The *Ammāyi* or the uncle's wife, whose presence on the occasion is essential, goes to the court-yard, and plucking a few leaves of the planted twig, squeezes a few drops of its juice into a cup. This she hands over to the brother, or uncle, if any, of the pregnant woman. It is necessary that the brother should wear a gold ring on his right hand ring-finger. Holding a country knife (*pisānkatti*) in his left hand, with its point towards the north, he pours the tamarind juice over his knife with his right hand three times

184

582

586

[684]

[689]

586

[578]

[684]

[626]

843

Pulikudi:

[787]

[824]

[604]

[300]

[593]

[411]